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POVERTY'S CHILDREN, A VIEW OF POOR FAMILIES BASED ON RESEARCH SPONSORED BY THE HEALTH AND WELFARE COUNCIL OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA.

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ONE OF A SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS DERIVED FROM THE CHILD REARING STUDY (CRS) OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IN WASHINGTON, D.C., THIS PAMPHLET ATTEMPTS TO REFUTE THE POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE POOR. CRS FINDINGS SHOW THAT SUCH FAMILIES DO NOT NEGLECT THEIR CHILDREN BUT RATHER ARE FORCED BY THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES TO TRAIN THEM TO BE INDEPENDENT. POOR FAMILIES CARE DEEPLY ABOUT EDUCATION AND OTHER MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES BUT LACK THE MONEY AND KNOWLEDGE TO REALIZE THESE ASPIRATIONS. ALTHOUGH ACCUSED OF PROMISCUITY, IN FACT THE CRS SAMPLE ARE PRUDISH AND INHIBITED ABOUT GIVING SEX INFORMATION TO THEIR CHILDREN, AND PLACE GREAT VALUE ON THE LEGITIMACY OF OFFSPRING. FATHERS DESERT THEIR FAMILIES MAINLY BECAUSE OF UNEMPLOYMENT OR LOW PAYING JOBS. URBANIZATION AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEPRIVATION, RATHER THAN A BACKGROUND OF SLAVERY, ARE THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CHARACTER OF NEGRO FAMILY LIFE. MEASURES TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THESE FAMILIES MUST BE BASED ON A CLINICAL APPROACH WHICH ATTENDS TO SUCH BACKGROUND FACTORS AS UNEMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, EDUCATION, AND SEGREGATION, WHICH HAVE LEAD TO ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR. POSITIVE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION MUST RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSITY OF LOW-INCOME LIFE STYLES AND REQUIRES A NONJUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH THE POOR. THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM CROSS-TELL, 1101 M STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005. (NH)

POVERTY'S CHILDREN

A view of poor families based on research sponsored by the Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area.

POVERTY'S CHILDREN

— As Others See Them

— As They See Themselves

— But for the Grace of God

This document is one of a series of publications that will be prepared by Communicating Research on the Urban Poor (CROSS-TELL), a project sponsored by the Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area for the purpose of utilizing the study findings of the 1960-64 Child Rearing Study (CRS) of Low Income Families in the District of Columbia. The income levels cited herein are dated to the time of the CRS interviews. Names of respondents are fictitious to preserve their anonymity. Both CRS, directed by Hylan Lewis, and CROSS-TELL were funded by Mental Health grants from the National Institute of Mental Health. The CROSS-TELL grant is MH2197.

Based on CRS reports and processed field materials, this document was written by Luther P. Jackson, director of CROSS-TELL, who is solely responsible for its contents. The manuscript was annotated by Eugene Lerner and typed by Rachel Brown. The design is by B. P. Carucci. The cover photograph is by Herb Levart. Communications relevant to this document should be addressed to CROSS-TELL, 1101 M Street, N.W., Washington, D. C., 20005.

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POVERTY'S CHILDREN – As Others See Them

Look here, man, you get around a lot and people talk to you, so you know a lot about what's going on. But you only know what's going on outside. You don't know what's going on behind the doors, but I do — because I'm behind those doors.

The Health and Welfare Council's Child Rearing Study (CRS) of Low Income Families in the District of Columbia was an attempt to get behind closed doors; to see poor families as they see themselves. From this perspective, CRS sought to (1) relate its findings to the problems of child neglect, parental inadequacy and dependency, and (2) suggest practical ways that community programs can be used to best serve the needs of the urban poor.[1]

In taking a fresh look at poverty, CRS did not seek structured responses and surface characteristics of a large number of families, but concentrated on a smaller number within their natural settings — the slum dwelling and the public housing project, the streetcorner and the settlement house. CRS Director Hylan Lewis, now a professor of sociology at Howard University, sent his team of assistants — social workers, sociologists, anthropologists and journalists — into the field to look for overt behavior characteristics of poor parents with the workers recording their own observations as well as those of neighbors and friends.[2]

Some CRS workers lived in the neighborhoods of the poor; one, for 15 months in a public housing project and another, for three months in the Central Northwest's Second Police Precinct area. Still another worker, a white anthropologist, "hung out" with Negro men on the Second Precinct's street corners. The workers reported thousands of observations and recorded taped interviews, including several book-length reports and transcriptions.[3]

The 1960-64 Child Rearing Study predated the current anti-poverty drive, yet CRS materials are so relevant to today's needs that the Health and Welfare Council organized Communicating Research on the Urban Poor (CROSS-TELL) to disseminate CRS materials and find ways they can be used by social workers, teachers and other professionals in furthering social action. The purpose of this document, the first in a series of CROSS-TELL publications, is to give a brief, plainly-stated overview of some of the CRS findings that are most relevant to current thinking about poor urban families.

The resource materials for *Poverty's Children* were drawn from a large number of CRS reports and papers, published and unpublished. Central among these was ***Child Rearing***

Practices Among Low-Income Families in the District of Columbia: A Progress Report, September 1959 - March 1961.[4] In preparing this manuscript, CROSS-TELL focused on findings resulting from one phase of CRS operations—a study of 55 families whose median income was $3,500. Here are some other general characteristics of these families:

- Forty-seven were Negro and eight were white.
- Twenty-two of the 55 received Public Assistance.
- Two out of three families lived in the Central Northwest section of Washington with most of these in the Second Police Precinct area. Others were scattered in the Northwest, Northeast and Southeast quadrants of the city.
- Seventeen years was the average length of residence of family heads in the District with a range from 6 months to 35 years. Three family heads were native to the city.
- Twenty-nine of the 55 had both parents in the household.
- There were 256 children, 18 years or under, for an average of between four and five children per household.[5]

The city's poor, including many of these 55 families, are known to teachers, social workers, policemen and probation officers. But the jobs of these professionals demand that they categorize poor families under the various labels imposed by the American society. Thus the poor are seen as "problems," and frequently as school dropouts, as neglected children, as welfare cheaters, as family deserters, as felons, parolees and probationers.

The job of the CRS workers was to see the poor as they see themselves; to see the poor on their own terms to find out what poor families think they are, and what they think they should be, rather than what the society thinks poor families are and what they should be.

One popular assumption starts with the proposition that Negro low-income families are not only a class apart and a race apart from the American mainstream, but are also a "culture" apart in terms of attitudes, values and goals.[6] By this rationale, the Negro poor are supposed to be particularly "hard-to-reach" by both whites and middle class Negroes. Social workers, teachers and other professionals, the theory goes, must find "indigenous leaders" or "people-to-people workers" among the ranks of the Negro poor, applying the rationale that these poor can only communicate with each other, or—in the vernacular—"speak the same language."[7]

The CRS study found that poor families speak English—not always grammatical English—with a clarity that social scientists and other professionals might well emulate. Most of the Negro poor are far from being inarticulate. Indeed, CRS workers—white as well as Negro—often found the "language" of the poor easier to understand than the jargon used by their own colleagues. CRS worker Elliott Liebow,

for instance, had no communication problem with Negro street corner males—men who are often pictured as being particularly hostile, non-communicative and "hard-to-reach."

Now a project director of the Adolescent Process Section, Mental Health Study Center, National Institute of Mental Health, Liebow, an anthropologist, attributes his acceptance by the Negro men to the circumstance that they, as well as he, wanted to be friendly. "I liked these guys and wanted to be with them," he says. Liebow had this to say in an unpublished document, *A Field Experience in Retrospect:*

> When in the field, I participated as fully and as wholemindedly as I could, limited only by my own sense of personal and professional propriety, and by what I assumed to be the boundaries of acceptable behavior as seen by those I was with. . . . Almost from the beginning, I adopted the dress and something of the speech of the people with whom I was in most frequent contact, as best I could without looking silly or feeling uncomfortable.[8]
>
> I switched my day around to coincide with the day worker's leisure hours: from four in the afternoon until late at night. How late at night depended on what was going on. Alone, or with one, two or half a dozen others, I went to pool rooms, to bars, to somebody's room or apartment; we threw a baseball around the alley, or on the sidewalk, or once, got a four-men-on-a-team softball game going in a parking lot. Much of the time we just hung around the Sandwich Shop, playing the pinball machine or standing on the corner watching the world go by. Regularly at five, I met my five "drinking buddies" when they came off from work and we went into a hallway for 30 or 45 minutes of good drinking and easy talk.[9]
>
> . . . My field notes contain a record of what I saw when I looked at Sonny, Jack, Larry and the others. I have only a small notion—and one that I myself consider suspect —of what they saw when they looked at me. Some things, however, are very clear. They saw, first of all, a white man. In my opinion, this fact of color, as they understood it in their experience and as I understood it in mine, irrevocably and absolutely relegated me to the status of outsider. I am not certain, but I have a hunch that they were more continuously aware of my being white than was I. . . . Whenever the fact of my being white was openly introduced, it pointed up the distance between me and the other person, even when the intent of introducing it was, I believe, to narrow the distance.[10]
>
> . . . The wall between us remains, or better, the chain-link fence between us, since despite the barriers, we were able to look at each other, walk alongside each other, talk, and occasionally touch fingers. When two people

> stand close to the fence on either side, without touching it, they can look through the interstices and forget that they are looking through a fence.[11]

Camille Jeffers, a social worker who is now an associate professor at the Atlanta University School of Social Work, also made some observations relevant to the so-called communication problem. After living in public housing for 15 months, Mrs. Jeffers noted that she was asked to join a Holiness church and was offered a staff position on another church of an independent denomination. In a 181-page manuscript titled *Living Poor*, she wrote:

> When Reverend Nelson visited me to express his interest in my becoming assistant Sunday School superintendent, I think he came because he saw me as a person with some training, and this meant to him that chances were good that I had some abilities and knowledge that would help him to achieve what he wanted for the children in his church and in his neighborhood. It was this "know-how" that he felt I had and that he did not have among his church leaders that was probably the important consideration in his design for change.[12]
>
> When Mrs. Cartwright asked me to join her church because she felt "the Lord had work for me to do there," she too was probably stimulated by my "non-indigenous" qualities. She said it would take the conversion and help of people with educational background and . . . status to bring her church the respect and recognition she thought it deserved.[13]

From the experience of CRS workers, then, it would seem that successful communication is a two-way street. Although they may not have completely scaled racial and/or class barriers, their experience clearly demonstrates that professionals can communicate effectively with the poor, and that the poor seek and need their help. They needed no "indigenous leaders" to help them "speak the language." They found that communication is best achieved by being willing to listen to what is said, and to respond with respect and sincerity.

But not only have professionals created artificial barriers between themselves and poor families. These professionals also have devised terms which make it more difficult for them to talk with each other.[14] In this lexicon, the poor are disguised by such labels as "underprivileged," "culturally deprived" and "socially disadvantaged." [15]

These labels may sound inoffensive enough, but they tend to put all of the poor under the same umbrella, thereby obscuring specific problems. Too often, for instance, scholars say "underprivileged" when they mean "Negro." [16] This tends to oversimplify the race problem and ignores Negroes who may be just privileged or, in a few instances, overprivileged.

The labels also fail to distinguish between the pandemic

poverty of an Appalachia and the epidemic poverty of a Detroit, hit—as it was a few years ago—by automation and a slackening demand for automobiles. Wherever they may be, the poor share the need for financial assistance, but programs that may be good for Detroit or Harlan County, Kentucky, may not be suitable for the long-time Negro or white slum resident whose endemic poverty is the all-pervading fact of his life.[17]

Although such an amalgam of the "underprivileged" may be good for political purposes—assuming, as it does, that whites, too, can be poor—the social scientist should specify similarities and differences. Ideally, the scientist, both social and physical, proceeds from specific findings to general conclusions. But in much of the current literature on poverty, tentative findings are the basis for sweeping generalizations about the nation's poor.[18] These generalizations accentuate supposed value and behavior differences between the affluent society, on one hand, and the poor on the other, and, unwittingly perhaps, those between whites and Negroes.

The studies proclaiming a "lower class cultural system" [19] and a "culture of poverty," [20] for instance, obscure the essential diversity of people of every social class. Such designations as "urban jungle" unwittingly feed the public's insatiable interest in sex and crime. Shorthand designations not only block adequate description and interpretation, but also reinforce "neo-stereotypes"—to use the phrase of the Children's Bureau's Elizabeth Herzog—about the poor and the areas in which they live.[21]

Among the neo-stereotypes assigned to the poor families, generally, and to the Negro families, particularly, are that the sexuality of the lower class is spontaneous, natural and free from inhibitions; that unwed mothers have babies to increase welfare payments and that lower class Negroes attach no stigma to illegitimacy.[22] These new stereotypes have displaced older prejudgments (Negroes are innately stupid, dishonest, lazy, *ad infinitum*). Neo-stereotypes threaten to introduce new oversimplifications that make for new distortions. For example, take the pathological patterns associated with the matriarchal or "broken" family in which the father is absent from the household. Contrary to the popular view, CRS findings suggest that the child-rearing climate may be often improved by virtue of a mother's separation from "a no good man." [23]

One general assumption, which has its roots in history, is that a matriarchal family pattern based on unfettered motherhood among Negro slave women is largely responsible for today's relatively high statistical incidence of Negro illegitimacy and female-headed households. E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States* [1939] is often cited in support of a sustained matriarchal tradition. The chapter titled "Downfall of the Matriarchate," however, indicates that before and after Emancipation the status of Negro males increased in proportion to their ability to gain a measure of

economic security.[24] This ascendancy is better described in Frazier's subsequent work, *The Negro in the United States* [1949]:

> In acquiring land the Negro husband and father laid the foundation for patriarchal authority in the family. His interest in his wife and children no longer rested upon a purely sentimental or habitual basis but on an economic tie. In some cases the interest of the father in his wife and children began when he bought them from their owners before Emancipation. But it was only after the Emancipation when the former slave established himself as a freedman that this phase of the development of masculine authority in family relations became important. Even among the freedmen who were tenants, it was customary for the father and husband to make contracts with the land-owners and assume responsibility for their families.
>
> This development of the family was associated with the development of other phases of the institutional life of the Negroes. The churches were under the control of men and the control which it exercised tended to confirm the man's interest and authority in the family. Moreover, in the Bible, which for the freedmen was the highest authority in such matters, they found a sanction for masculine authority in the Negro family. Although in some localities the prejudice of this group toward the newly emancipated blacks prevented intermarriage at first, gradually the more successful freedmen married into the families that had been free before Emancipation.[25]

It is in what Frazier termed "The City of Destruction" that the status of many Negro males declined.[26] CRS findings support the sociologist's view that urbanization and subsequent job insecurity often combined to weaken the unskilled Negro male's status as a family provider.[27] The father's position may be undermined if the mother works, and domestic service has continued to provide steady and increasing opportunities for female employment.[28] In contrast, jobs for unskilled Negro men, both rural and urban, are rapidly declining.[29] This suggests that the role of the Negro male in the family is more influenced by today's economy than by his slave status of the last century.

It is in the "city of destruction" that many Negro fathers, if they work at all, engage in the most obviously menial jobs or, at best, go off to some place known to children as "the factory."[30] Urbanization, moreover, has had similar effects upon poor white families, particularly those from Appalachia.[31] Nor are middle and upper class fathers immune from urban influences. Suburbanization, for example, has compromised the role of fathers who commute 30 miles to some place called "the office."[32]

CRS findings, in sum, show that the problems besetting poor families often mirror those that affect the affluent

society; that differences between middle income and low income lie not so much in life objectives as in the ways that poor families alone must face the grim consequences of insufficient income.[33] From the perspective of poverty, excessive drinking, stealing. fighting, or sexual promiscuity is frequently condemned, often tolerated, but rarely condoned. CRS workers found that within the ranks of the poor there are some who are lazy, others ambitious; some strait-laced, others sinful; some wasteful, others thrifty. Within their economic metes and bounds, the lives of the poor are as diverse as human nature itself;[34] or to put it another way, those who look at the poor might reflect, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

NOTES: As Others See Them

1. See Child Rearing Study (CRS), Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area, *Child Rearing Practices Among Low-Income Families in the District of Columbia, A Progress Report,* September 1959-March 1961, pp. 4-6. For earlier Health and Welfare Council reports on dependency, see *What Price Dependency?,* Washington, D. C., 1959; and Gizella Huber, *Economic Indicators of Family and Child Dependency in the District of Columbia,* 1958.
2. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.,* pp. 17-22. See also, Hylan Lewis, "Discussion of [Marian R. Yarrow's paper on] 'Problems of Methods in Family Studies,' " paper presented at the National Conference on Social Welfare, New York City, May 29, 1962. (Mimeographed).
3. CRS field workers and the dates of their participation: Constance E. H. Daniel (5/60-12/61); Dora R. Evers (5/60-8/62); Camille Jeffers (9/60-6/65); Laco M. Johnson (4/60-6/60); Roscoe E. Lewis (6/60-8/60); Elliott Liebow (1/62-7/63); Hortense Lilly (8/60-7/61); Richard Slobodin (6/60-8/60); Jane Tatum (1/60-7/60); Nathaniel Tillman (7/62-8/62); William C. Watson, Jr. (2/62-7/62).
4. CRS papers and reports not cited in this document include: H. Lewis, "Comments on 'Poverty: An Anthropologist's View'," by Thomas Gladwin, National Conference on Social Welfare, Minneapolis, Minn., May 17, 1961; H. Lewis, "Discussion of 'Toward a Conceptual Framework for Casework with Multiproblem Families', by Louise Bandler, 'Neighborhood Development—a Self-Help Developmental Program', by Marceleete Womack, and 'School Experiences of Culturally Deprived Children', by Paul Bowman," National Conference on Social Welfare, Los Angeles, California, May 29, 1964; and H. Lewis, "Basic Issues of Social Change: An Appreciation," Conference on Social Change and Professional Responsibility, Social Issues Committee, American Orthopsychiatric Association, New York City, November 7, 1964.
5. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.,* pp. 7-12.
6. For the CRS point of view on the "culture of poverty," see H. Lewis, "Culture, Class and the Behavior of Low Income Families," paper given at the Conference on Lower Class

Culture, Barbizon Plaza Hotel, New York City, June 27-29, 1963, p. 13; also H. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty Approach to Social Problems," paper presented at Plenary Session, Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Montreal, Canada, August 29, 1964, p. 6. For other critiques of the "culture of poverty" see Alvin L. Schorr, "The Nonculture of Poverty," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 5, October 1964, pp. 907-912; and Elizabeth G. Meier, "Culturally Deprived Children: Implications for Child Welfare," *Child Welfare*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, February 1966, pp. 65-73. For exponents of the "culture of poverty" approach see Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959, pp. 2-3; *idem.*, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*, New York: Vintage Books, 1961, pp. xxiv-xxvii; and Walter B. Miller, *Cultural Features of an Urban Lower Class Community*, (mimeographed), n.d., pp. 11, 26 ff.

7. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 10.
8. Elliott Liebow, "A Field Experience in Retrospect: January 1962 - December 1962," pp. 20-21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
12. Camille Jeffers, *Living Poor: A Participant-Observation Study of Choices and Priorities*, CRS manuscript, p. 176.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
14. Edward E. Mueller and Philip J. Murphy, "Communication Problems: Social Workers and Lawyers," *Social Work*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1965, pp. 97-103.
15. Bernard Goldstein suggests that such labels place the burden on victims, rather than on institutions. See his "The Casualties of Malintegration: Some Comments on the Art of Labelling," lecture delivered to the Urban Issues Seminar, Urban Studies Center, Rutgers — The State University, New Brunswick, N. J., October 2, 1964, pp. 3-5.
16. H. Lewis, "Assisting the Negro Family Caught in Social Change," speech at Golden Anniversary Conference of the National Urban League, September 7, 1960, Hotel Commodore, New York, pp. 4-5. See also, H. Lewis, "The Changing Negro Family," in Eli Ginzburg (ed.), *The Nation's Children*, Vol. I: *The Family and Social Change*, pp. 130-131, 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
17. H. Lewis, "The Contemporary Urban Poverty Syndrome," address to Howard University medical students, April 28, 1964, p. 6.
18. For examples of such generalizations see Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez*, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* and Walter B. Miller, *Cultural Features . . . , op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* For a review of the relevant literature, see Catherine S. Chilman, "Child Rearing and Family Relationship Patterns of the Very Poor," *Welfare in Review*, January 1965, pp. 9-19.
19. W. B. Miller, *ibid.*, p. 8.

20. O. Lewis, *Five Families . . . , op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

21. E. Herzog & H. Lewis, "Priorities in Research About Unmarried Mothers," paper presented at symposium, "Research Perspectives on the Unmarried Mother," Eastern Regional Conference, Child Welfare League of America, New York, April 1961, p. 8.; and H. Lewis, "Culture, Class . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

22. E. Herzog & H. Lewis, *ibid.*

23. C. Jeffers, "Sex Values, Pre-Marital Pregnancy, and Illegitimacy in Study Group of Low Income Families," CRS staff working paper, p. 10.

24. *The Negro Family in the United States,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, Chapter IX, pp. 163-181.

25. *The Negro in the United States,* New York: MacMillan, 1949, pp. 314-315.

26. *The Negro Family in the United States, op. cit.*, Part IV, "In the City of Destruction," pp. 271-390.

27. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, pp. 55-66; E. Herzog & H. Lewis, "Priorities in Research . . . ," *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. See also, E. F. Frazier, *The Negro Family . . . , op. cit.*, Chapter XXI, pp. 461 ff.

28. Mollie Orshansky, "Who's Who Among the Poor: A Demographic View of Poverty," *Social Security Bulletin,* July 1965, (reprint), p. 21. See also, Rashi Fein, "An Economic and Social Profile of the Negro American," *Daedalus,* Fall 1965, pp. 830-831; and E. F. Frazier, *The Negro in the United States, op. cit.*, p. 303.

29. See St. Clair Drake, "The Social and Economic Status of the Negro in the United States," *Daedalus,* Fall 1965, p. 809.

30. See R. Fein, *op. cit.*, pp. 829-830.

31. See Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States,* New York: MacMillan, 1962, pp. 96-100.

32. There have been a number of studies of the effects of suburbanization on family life since World War II. Among them are William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man,* New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957, and Richard E. Gordon, Katherine K. Gordon & Max Gunther, *The Split-Level Trap,* New York: Bernard Geis Associates/Random House, 1960.

33. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia," paper presented at the National Conference on Social Welfare, Minneapolis, Minn., May 16, 1961, pp. 9-10.

34. On diversity of character and personality types among the poor, see H. Lewis, "Culture, Class . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 4; and Robert C. Weaver, "Human Values of Urban Life," *The Annals: Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science,* May 1960, pp. 33-34, and *The Urban Complex,* New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966, p. 29.

POVERTY'S CHILDREN – As They See Themselves

The Child Rearing Study opened many doors in the Nation's Capital to find out about the poor — their anxieties about food, clothing, health and shelter, their attitudes about work and their hope for their children. To find out, CRS workers listened. . . .

> *There was no food in the house and I didn't want them to have to go to school hungry and then come home hungry too. I felt that if I kept them home with me, at least when they cried and asked for a piece of bread, I would be with them and put my arms around them.*
>
> *He'd come home from school with his clothes torn half off, and I'd whip him and make him fight back. Now I have to whip him to stop him from fighting. Out in the street, the big boys beat the little boys . . . they have to fight. . . . But the teachers don't seem to understand.*
>
> *I keep telling myself there's no such thing as can't. I keep saying I'm going to manage somehow. I think a lot of people would get along better if they didn't give up so quickly. A person should set himself a certain level, reach for it and stay with it. That is what I'm struggling and keep on struggling to do.*
>
> *I wouldn't make them get married. I'd have to stick by them, but it would be a hurting thing.*
>
> *What else could be more important to a woman than a man? Maybe it's the money. Some of the men gives them money, but that is a simple question. . . . I ain't got no education, but I do have a lot of mother wit and I know that there ain't nothing more important to a woman than a man.*
>
> *They were hard working in Carolina. That's what I can't understand. They were very hard working at home, but they changed here.*

Many of the aspirations voiced by the poor had a familiar, middle-class ring, such as the desire to "set a certain level, reach for it and stay with it." But most low income families do not, dare not reach too high. Their goals, more often than not, are the same as those of families with adequate income, but their priorities are focused on the bare essentials: food, clothing, shelter, health.[1]

CRS workers found attitudes, values and goals, which might, at a glance, appear as traits that are peculiar to the poor. Perhaps one of the most widely shared of these is the pragmatic cast of behavior and hopes; a reluctance to risk

dreams that are beyond reach.[2] The fantasies of many low income families are limited, for instance, to what they could do with a pay raise of $5, or $10, or $15 a week. One father of six said: *If I could get me a job . . . making $75 a week I could make it with ease . . . wouldn't even be a strain.*[3] One might wonder how any father could "make it" on so little.

Making Ends Meet: *There was no food in the house and I didn't want them to have to go to school hungry and then come home hungry too. . .*[4]

CRS found that the amount and regularity of family income makes a significant difference in the child rearing priorities of parents. Thus the mother who decided to keep her hungry children home did not necessarily demonstrate unconcern about education or truancy. Her most urgent concern was how she would feed, shelter and clothe eight children on her husband's earnings of $52 a week as a restaurant worker in nearby Virginia. In this accounting of where the money went, the mother indicates that she was not so alienated from the affluent society that she did not want her children to have "a little something" for themselves:

> *We pay $37.50 every other week on the* [monthly] *rent. On those weeks he only has about $9.50 to give me for food for the family because he has to take $5 a week for carfare to get to his job. Then on the other weeks, he pays $15 on the gas and light bills and that leaves me only $32 to take care of everything else in the house for that week. And the next week too. Because our large rent bill is so high, I try to use the money the best I can. . . . I try to give the children a penny or two, to spend once in a while, because I think children just ought to have a little something to spend.*[5]

Some parents refused to send their children to school looking "raggedy," and one mother, who had been jailed for assaulting her husband, placed her priority on the shelter of her nine children, even though she later had misgivings about such a long separation:

> *You know, I didn't have to stay in jail those two weeks. I could have paid $40 for bail and gotten out but I just kind of felt that maybe I'd stay there for a while. I had $73 on me because I had the rent money on me. One mind told me to pay the bail and the other mind said "no." So when they told me I could make one phone call I told them to just call the rent man and tell him to come and get the rent and I would stay in jail. . . .*
>
> *. . . The only thing that worried me while I was in jail was the children. I worried about them as they have never been separated from me before. When I got out of jail my husband came for me and asked me if I didn't want to come home to fix something to eat for the children*

first. I told him "no." I just wanted to get the children and I kept right on from jail to Junior Village to get them. They had been taken good care of there, but there won't be no more separations. The next separation will have to be a death separation. . . .[9]

Within the 55 families, irregularity was the most consistent family income pattern. Estimated family income ranged from under $2000 to slightly more than $6000 in the case of one family whose income more than doubled due to the wife's acceptance of a Government job after the case study was under way.[7] The estimated median family income for all families was $3,500.[8]

Fathers were largely employed as service workers and laborers.[9] Working mothers were generally employed sporadically as domestics.[10] Few of the respondents were old enough to receive retirement and pension funds.[11] There were scarcely any additional resources from private sources outside of the family.

The biggest complaint about money was — of course — that there was not enough of it. The most prevalent attitude about budgeting was summed up by the mother who said, *There's not much use in putting money aside . . . when you just have to go right ahead and spend it.* Some families attempted to budget, with mothers generally assuming that task. One notable exception was a couple who shared the marketing responsibility, or as the mother explained:

Me and him always do this [marketing] *together. I like to ask him his opinion on what I get because when I go by myself sometimes I spend too much. I always carry a pencil and paper with me and add up things as we go along. Then he tells me when I have gotten to the amount he thinks we can spend.*[12]

Camille Jeffers — the CRS field worker who lived in public housing — found a form of mutual aid that was used in lieu of money for babysitters and other goods and services. "It was impressive," Mrs. Jeffers comments, "to see how quickly some mothers could parcel out their children and just as impressive to see the way some neighbors would rise to the occasion when such demands were made.

"For example, when Mrs. Norton had to undergo emergency hospitalization for a few days, some friends of hers, who already had three children of their own, took Mrs. Norton's children. The wife cared for them during the day and the husband slept in Mrs. Norton's apartment with the children at night."[13]

The mutual aid system also included the borrowing of a wide variety of household goods. Returnable items were brought back, and promises of repayment in kind were made — and kept — in borrowing expendable items. Mrs. Jeffers also noted an "informal barter system" of services among

some of the tenants. One mother, for instance, who was skilled as a hairdresser would often utilize her ability in exchange for baby sitting services.[14]

The give-and-take, however, did not include the borrowing of money, simply because there was not much money in circulation. As a general rule, the families paid bills and acquired food stocks as soon as they received their wages. In a few days the money was gone, and there was little or nc cash on hand until the next payment. Thus, for example, a request for carfare was more likely to be phrased as a request for a car token on the theory that a lender might have a week's supply of car tokens instead of cash. Again, rather than attempt to borrow money for food, a mother was more apt to ask for specific items — several slices of bread, a cup of sugar, or an egg.[15]

Among families seeking or receiving Public Assistance, there were misunderstandings about eligibility qualifications, and the amounts that a family might be entitled to after a disability or the birth of another child.[16] One mother — whose husband was unemployed during the severe 1960 winter — was bewildered by the District of Columbia's rule which prohibits women with an able-bodied "man in the house" from receiving Aid for Dependent Children:

> *. . . They told me that they could only help me only if Ken were not with me under the same roof. The lady said, "If your husband were not with you, we would help you." That is rather strange. I would not want him to leave us so that I could get their help. They should have an emergency fund; something like a loan that we could pay back when he gets work again.*

Some husbandless mothers were resentful of the Welfare Department's Investigation Unit, whose functions include night visits to enforce the "man in the house" rule.[17] One woman, however, was somewhat philosophical:

> *When you're getting free money you have to take what comes. I've known the day when I wouldn't take that — someone peeping in my bedroom. But I know I just have to take it now.*[18]

Yet only a minority of the Public Assistance families were critical of Welfare Department rules. Several mothers and two fathers expressed gratitude. Others thought the sums were inadequate, but one mother was at least satisfied with her management of her Public Assistance grant: *It don't worry me to be broke as long as I know I ain't throwed it away.*[19]

One mother whose husband was temporarily unemployed said that he had gone on a "merry-go-round" of private as well as public agencies in search of a loan: *This agency tells you to go to this agency, and this agency sends you to another agency.*[20] Failing to receive help, the husband stole a

radio in an attempt to get some money. He was arrested and placed on probation, but he said that if he was faced with the same circumstances, he would steal again. Then his voice trailed off in anger: *You have to do something. . . . I mean, when you're home and your child asks for a piece of bread, and you* [can't] *give it to him, then. . . .*

Growing Up Poor: *He'd come home from school with his clothes torn off, and I'd whip him and make him fight back. Now, I have to whip him to stop him from fighting.*

Many poor parents show love for their children in familiar ways. They readily respond to children's needs for play and their demands "to pick me up and give me some sugar." One couple — working parents with six children — always fitted a play period for their two-month-old daughter into their busy daily schedule, or as the mother put it: *She's mama's girl in the morning and daddy's girl at night.*

A 19-year-old mother of a 3-year-old boy saw a need for giving children at least a few pennies a day; and even a bicycle for Christmas, if they wanted it. Children, she said, need love and affection: *Just putting a child on your knee and saying "I love you" does so much for a child.*

But many poor parents can not provide any of the extra attention, or the pennies and toys that their children need. Such was the case of a mother who had 10 children in 11 years. A CRS worker gave this description of the mother's children at play:

> In all my visits to Mrs. Just's apartment and during the times I have watched them playing in front of the house I have never seen any of the children with toys. When they play in the hallway the play consists of wrestling, running up and down the steps in the apartment, sliding down the bannister and jumping from the steps into the hallway. When they tire of this they come to the front steps, rest for a few minutes, then return to the hallway and resume the same pattern of play. I have never seen any of the girls with dolls. Mary and Wilma had varied these [physical] activities in playing with two girls next door in a small square patch of dirt. All four girls had spoons and were digging up the dirt . . . and were transferring it to dirty paper plates. I asked them what they were playing. "Nothing" was their response.

Yet life was not all play for these children without toys. The play was often interrupted by the demands on the children to tend to smaller children, go to the store, or to clean the apartment. Thus these children's responsibilities exceeded the little chores — emptying waste baskets, putting away toys — that are frequently required in a middle class home.

This mother, like many mothers, found it difficult to respond to the emotional needs of her children.[21] Yet the most

callous parents probably saw no virtue in child neglect. Their statements suggesting neglect smacked of perverseness, defiance, bravado, or desperation of the I-don't-care type. This was illustrated by the following incident:

> When a neighbor commented to a mother in a low-income project that one of the mother's four children appeared to have a bad cold, the mother, referring to herself, calmly said, *Her mother don't care!* At the neighbor's expression of surprise that she would say such a thing, the mother, bridling at the implied criticism, countered with, *Well, that's the way it is so I might as well tell the truth.*[22]

Camille Jeffers found that many seemingly clear cases of child neglect were actually a means of independence training. "Some mothers," she wrote, "seem to withhold affection not because they reject their children but because they want to train the children away from dependency on them. They have to get each child 'out of the way' as soon as possible in order to go on to the next child."[23]

In the case of a project mother whose four children were born after she was crippled by a bout with polio, independence training was a virtual necessity. At eight or nine months, her children were taught how to pull themselves up and down three flights of stairs without help. Three-year-old Brenda prepared her infant sister's milk and changed her diapers. "When I stopped by their apartment," Mrs. Jeffers recalled, "I would often find Dorothy [age 4] and Brenda busily cleaning, one with a broom and the other with a dust cloth. Two-year-old Tootsie also was pressed into service to pick up things off the floor."[24]

Many poor children are taught how to care for themselves in the rough and tumble play of the streets and playgrounds, or as Mrs. Jeffers observed:

> Characteristically, when a child came to one of the mothers in the court crying about having been hit, the mother showed little or no outward sympathy for the tears. In most instances, she would demand to know why her child had not hit back or retrieved the toy that had been taken. Whatever the case, mothers seemed to be making the point to their children that they should respond to attack or slight more aggressively. A mother was as likely to send her child back into the situation with such instructions and a threat of punishment if he did not obey her instructions.[25]

But parents who stress independence training may soon find themselves in the dilemma of the mother who made her boy fight, then had to "whip him to stop him from fighting." Once they have learned to shift for themselves children often resist parental control. Yet parents struggle to stay on top; some philosophize about "hard heads make soft asses," and others threaten to "beat their butts." Some try non-violent methods which may be more emotionally damaging. Such a

method—used by the mother of 10 children—was described by a CRS observer:

> When the children have done something and she doesn't know which one of them is guilty, she lines them all up and asks them which one did whatever it was that was done. Usually, all the children will confess except [seven-year-old] Mary. Knowing that Mary has done it, Mrs. Just says that she begins a little sermon in which she says that God knows the guilty person, that He will cause the guilty one to have an accident if the guilty one doesn't confess.
>
> This sermon goes on until finally Mary confesses. Mrs. Just said that Mary begins to sob loudly: *Oh, Mama, Oh, Mama, I did it, I did it! Don't let God give me no accident!* After this confession, Mrs. Just said that she doesn't punish Mary because she figures that [the child] has suffered enough.

In resisting control, many children seek their pleasures outside of the home, which affords few pleasures or comforts. In some low income households, the floor space is nearly covered with beds. The living rooms and kitchens, even, may double as sleeping quarters. Home often is simply a place to sleep, and hopefully, to eat. The close quarters, the drabness, the lack of something to do drives children into the streets.[26]

The late Roscoe E. Lewis, a Hampton Institute professor, who lived in the Second Police Precinct area while a member of the CRS staff, wrote this vignette of children on their own:

> . . . Occasionally you see a group of the younger ones playing "taxi" in a derelict car—taking turns at the steering wheel, starting the car off. "Where you want to go, lady?" But the larger kids are on the block, the only place where there are any "pickings."
>
> Picking begins about 8:00 A.M. The sidewalks and gutters of the block are carefully searched; drunks of the night before may have dropped a coin, or even lost their pocketbooks or cigarettes. The yards of the few who are "family" people are investigated; there may be papers or bottles that others have missed. There are juke boxes and the cigarette machines to be searched for unused coins; the floors of the restaurants and those bars that will let them in have to be looked over. For this age group, asking passersby for coins is child's play. Morning is a busy time for the 10-12 year old group.
>
> When "pickings" is finished the rest of the day is given over to methods of play that can be carried out on concrete sidewalks. The younger ones roll discarded automobile tires down the sidewalk—the smaller tires which can accelerate fast, usually winning. There is a great variety of hop, skip and jump games played by the girls: there are several different versions of playing ball among

the boys. The dangerous games: "Beat-the-car across-the-street," and "Make-the-car-screech" are played occasionally by the older boys—those in the 10-12 year old group. It is not a day long game, for those who play it realize it is a dangerous game. It is played only when each one can show a stake—a nickel, a street car token, a couple of cigarettes, perhaps picked off the street.[27]

Many poor children are affected by such experiences outside the home, despite parents' attempts to shield them from the streets. One mother, for instance, always sent her children to the backyard to play because she didn't want them to hear the "cussing on the corner."

Neighborhood influences diminish parental confidence earlier and more sharply in the slums than in other areas. This contributes to a "cut-off" process in parental control and support. The process may begin when children are five or six. By the time they reach nine or 10, parents often lose confidence in their ability to control and give attention to their children. Parents also may lose their will to care and command.[28] Such parental inadequacy usually occurs during the adolescence of children in middle class homes.[29]

Evidence of a "cut-off" process at work does not mean that poor parents abandon their children to the streets or to Junior Village—the District of Columbia's institution for dependent children. Contrary to much of the early literature on class and child rearing, low-income children are not necessarily granted the freedom to stay out to all hours or to roam the streets.[30] Frequently the children's freedom appears to be wrested from their begrudging elders.[31] These children, in effect, hurl the challenge, "You can't make me!," and prove it.[32] A 54-year-old woman, who was trying to rear four grandchildren and two great grandchildren, spoke of her problems in trying to maintain control:

> *When I tell them to do this or that, instead of telling you "Yes, Mama," they say, "Well, I cannot. I don't feel like doing." They get up in your shoes and want to tell you what to do.*

Parents are unable to compete with neighborhood influences which apparently have stronger pulls on their children than maternal demands for good manners, respect, floor scrubbing and supervision of young children. The impotence and bafflement of parents recurs in the CRS reports as a mixture of hope and resignation:[33]

> *I do hope they don't get in trouble. I tried to raise them right. The Lord will have to look out for them.*
>
> *I'm glad mine are little. I kinda hate to see them grow up. At least I can do something for them now.*

Parents cite the "change in the times" as the reason for their inadequacy, or as one mother of eight put it:

Children are too grown up nowadays. They are just like men and women. Nowadays, I'll tell you one thing. Children know more than I do, that is, some of them do. Children nowadays have a mind like a grown person. You can't tell them much because they already know a lot of things while they are still very little.[34]

Parents seemed more concerned with the consequences of the loss of control of girls than over boys. Fears about a girl's "running the street" are expressed long before the onset of the cut-off process.[35] Concern for boys often focuses on "mixing with the wrong crowds." But both boys and girls, one mother observed, "begin to get ideas of their own" around nine or 11 years.

The cut-off process also includes a loss in parental hopes for the futures of children. Parents often feel that their efforts can not really change the course of their youngsters' lives.[36] Thus parents may unwittingly send their children down the road to failure.

Getting Ahead: *I keep telling myself there is no such thing as can't. I keep saying I'm going to manage somehow . . .*

In considering what low-income parents want for themselves and their children it must be remembered that although the values of the poor are similar to those of the middle class, the aspirations of the poor are limited to fewer choices.[37] But it also should be noted that class lines are not as tightly drawn as the labels "upper", "middle" and "lower" class might indicate. Thus, low-income parents whose incomes may be below any arbitrary poverty level may have relatives or friends whose income, educations and way of living may be "middle class" by any standard.[38] Some CRS respondents had hard-working parents who were upwardly mobile, possessing such middle class accouterments as cars, homes and stylish furnishings.[39] But several of these mothers and fathers felt that their parents acquired their modest affluence by denying opportunities to their children, or as a public housing resident bluntly put it: *My parents should not have sacrificed us to get a house.*[40]

Many low income families try to meet selected middle class goals but find themselves bogged down by basic demands for food, shelter, clothing. CRS worker Camille Jeffers noted that her public housing neighbors were striving to make the lives of their children better than their own. Yet she had this to say about three mothers whose living standards were below those of their parents:

> These were not uncomplicated families—the project mothers' or their parents'. They were very knowing families. In much of their behavior and their expressed standards they straddled the deprivation and poverty from which they came and middle class striving and affluence. They knew the meaning of the empty refrigera-

> tor as well as the champagne fountain at a New Year's Eve party. While beds from Goodwill may be a current necessity, this did not preclude the live hope that the French Provincial living room suite would some day be a reality. The child for whom there was no money for a birthday party might yet be glamourously outfitted for a debutante's ball. They had seen it happen in their families.
>
> Some of the young mothers in the housing project were, in some superficial way, about where their parents were twenty years ago. While they may have to, or seek to, travel the same laborious path as their parents, there is a real question . . . whether their chances, and their children's chances, are as good as their parents'.[41]

This observation is laden with implications that reflect on the changing nature of the U. S. economy. The changing employment opportunities and educational demands imposed by advancing technology may have the effect of freezing class lines and diminishing job opportunities, preventing unskilled and semi-skilled workers, whose trades have become obsolete, from climbing the social ladder. Some poor families are aware of economic changes and increased educational requirements even though these changes are completely beyond their control. One mother—the wife of an unskilled high school dropout—grimly stated: *The time is soon coming when you will need a college degree to sweep the street.*

Both that wife and her husband foresaw a need for their six children to go to college, or at least to a trade school, and were trying to prepare their children for the future. They encouraged the children to watch educational and cultural TV programs, rather than cartoons, cowboy and gangster films. The mother said: *I think the children need more programs which require them to use their heads instead of just getting a gun and going bang, bang, bang all the time.*

She also planned to take out a summer subscription to the "Weekly Reader," because she felt that it would help the children develop a habit of reading newspapers. She acquired at least two records ("Pagliacci" by Caruso and "The Toreador Song" by Nelson Eddy) as first steps in music appreciation.

This father and mother thus attempted to raise the educational and cultural sights of their children, even though they were employed respectively as an assembly line worker at a bottling plant and as a charwoman in a Federal office building.

Many of the other parents were far less ambitious in their hopes for their children, citing the completion of high school as a realizable educational goal. High school was seen as a passport to a "good" job, a job that is regular, contrasting with the seasonal work of so many low-income males; a job that pays enough to provide a modicum of security; a job that does not require the physical strain of common labor. Beyond

these goals, many low income families dared not hope. One mother gave this assessment:

> *My husband didn't have no education and had to do laboring work. If my children could read, they could get a job driving a truck or working in a store. They could learn to use the cash register if they know how to add. They can be somebody. If you don't have no education, you have to take the first thing they give you. If you go to an employment agency, you'd get a job probably dishwashing since you had no education. I want them to do something better.*[42]

Another mother was more succinct and emphatic: *I'll be satisfied as long as they ain't doing no day's work in nobody's house and working in nobody's kitchen!*[43]

An aspiration voiced by many of the parents is that their children qualify for a "governnment job." To most of the low-income parents, any governnment job represents a measure of security beyond their own experience.

Some of the parents spoke of job hopes for their children which would require study beyond high school. Most often mentioned were professions as preachers, teachers, nurses, doctors and lawyers—the only positions outside of Government that Washington Negroes could aspire to a generation ago. Few parents however, cited values other than money, status, security: values that would be inherent in the job itself. One mother wanted her children to be "doing the work that the world needs at this time."

Few parents sought to project their own career goals upon their children. The most persistent response to questions regarding job aspirations was an "I-want-the-children-to-decide-for-themselves" theme. Here are some examples:

> *I believe in leaving the decision of a job to the child.*
>
> *Well, it's hard to choose for a child. As a rule they pick out what* [jobs] *they want themselves.*
>
> *But I don't believe in telling a child to be this or that. My boys can do the kind of work they want.*
>
> *. . . Any kind* [of job] *that suits them is what I hope they do. It doesn't make any difference to me what kind of work they do. That's left up to them.*

Rarely could a parent's job be used as a source of inspiration for a child's job or career. Most parents were only experienced in the dull, repetitious work of the porter, domestic, laborer, construction worker, or dishwasher.[44]

Few parents had any idea of how hopes for their children could be achieved, or how they could help children reach these goals. One father had hopes of his bright, teenage daughter becoming a teacher or a nurse, but had never spoken to the daughter about it. Another parent thought that her 12-year-old son's good handwriting would help him become

a teacher, but took no part in guiding the child towards the profession.

Several parents, however, bought encyclopedias for their children as homework aids. One such mother with two children in junior high school said that neither she nor her husband could help the children

> *. . . because the books they use is complicated now. When they go to their father, he says "Go to your mother." When they come to me, I tell them "Go look in your encyclopedia."*

Another mother had the hope that a $4-a-month insurance policy, which she was considering, would finance her children through college. Then she spoke of her own educational inadequacy:

> *They* [her children] *know more than I do. It hurts me when they bring a hard question and I can't help them. Of course, I don't show it to them. I don't want them to know that I can't help them.*[45]

The poor are not unaware of the value of education; indeed, they are keenly alert to its economic and material rewards. The rub is that poor families lack the money, the "know-how" and the "contacts" for helping children realize educational goals. Thus there is a wide divergence between what low income families say they want for their children and what these same parents do, or are able to do for their children.[46] Most often from economic necessity, the parents can't practice what they preach.

This was demonstrated by one mother who was not only poor, but was also an alcoholic and had her six children by at least three different fathers. Yet she had a clear conception of what family life should be:

> *A good family would be a family where the wife and the husband get along with each other and understand one another. They'd also have faith in each other. That'd be necessary for it to be a good family. That makes the whole of everything—faith and trust. It helps you to raise the children. If the mother and the father carry themselves right, then the children will try to carry themselves right, too. Children do what they see grown-ups do. Children love their mother and they feel that if Mama can do that, I can do that too.*

In and Out of Wedlock: *I wouldn't make them get married. I'd have to stick by them, but it would be a hurting thing.*

Low income families know the standards of acceptable behavior, even though statistics, such as those for illegitimacy, may suggest that they more often fall short of achieving these standards. This paradox is apparent in CRS materials showing that the sexuality of poor families is not generally

spontaneous, natural and free of inhibitions, and that poor families do attach a stigma to illegitimacy.[47]

Thus middle class taboos about sex are shared by poor families, even though crowded housing, cramped sleeping arrangements and slum neighborhood influences all contribute to children's early exposure to sex.[48] Yet parents are blocked from teaching children about sex because of prudish attitudes and inhibitions, often inherited from their own parents—or not knowing how to go about it. Even when mothers want to teach their children, some find it impossible to overcome their embarrassment. One mother explained:

> *It was the way I was raised. I have a very strict mother and she never came out and talked to me about it and when* [the children] *came to me I just couldn't.*[49]

Victorian-type attitudes were found among many mothers, irrespective of their own sex experience. Thus a mother of three illegitimate children, for instance, blushed at the mention of sex and said, *I don't believe in that nasty talk.*[50] The description of sex as "nasty" recurs in a number of mothers' responses.

Squeamishness about "nasty talk" extends to menstruation.[51] Here, a mother of three recalls her first menstrual period when she was nine years old:

> *I woke up one morning and when I saw blood I was horrified and did not tell anything to my own mother, but then I went to my girl friend's mother and she explained what it was. . . . After a week or so I told my mother. She told me to keep myself clean and that was all.*

Most of the ignorance and inhibitions found in the inadequate sex education of many CRS respondents are apparent in the following statement by a mother whose 12 children, all legitimate, range from five to 22:

> *. . . I didn't know anything about sex or intercourse until I married. My mother and father never told us anything about sex or even about menstruation. . . . After I started menstruating I told my sisters about it. I was the "teacher" for my sisters.*
>
> *. . . My mother used to sit down with all of us girls and tell us not to kiss boys. She also told us not to answer questions which the boys asked. She said, "If the boys you go to parties with and who come here to see you ask any questions, tell the boys to come and ask me and your father. . . ."*
>
> *We used to ask mother when she was carrying a baby how did she get that way. . . . She would just say, "It is Mother Nature." One of my sisters said she was going to slip out and find out what mother was talking about. This sister turned and slipped out and had a baby before she was married. . . .*

I got married rather than slip up. I didn't say anything to my parents about getting married. I just went off and got married when I was 18 years old. No, mother didn't want me to get married and she told me absolutely nothing about marriage.

I thought I would get married and help mother with the other children. I sort of got married more to help my mother than really be married. I wasn't thinking about having any children of my own when I was married and we didn't have children until we had been married four years. I thought people just married to have husbands.

Such ignorance of the demands of marriage and sex not only contributes to the high illegitimacy rates among poor families, but also lends credence to the widely accepted stereotype that low-income families, particularly Negroes, attach no stigma to illegitimacy. On the contrary, mothers repeatedly mentioned the value of children "having a name." [52] Pregnancy out-of-wedlock frequently was termed as a "first mistake" which should not be repeated:

I feel strongly because a girl makes a mistake once—once a mistake, twice a habit—give her to know that she just doesn't have to lay down and wallow, that after she's had the baby she can get a job, work, and take care of her child and in due time she will find someone who will love her and the child.[53]

The acceptance of the "first mistake" does not imply, however, that there is no emotional upheaval on the part of the parents. When a grandmother learned in court that her granddaughter's mistake had occurred in their own living room, she said: *I just knew I was going to die. I had tried so hard.*[54]

There was general opposition to forced marriages, however. This opposition is perhaps based on the American value that one should marry for love. The stress on marriage for love may well be related to the fact that the poor, particularly the Negro poor, have less opportunity to marry for economic gain or social status.[55]

In speaking of ideal marriage situations, respondents spoke more of faith, respect and understanding than they did of love. Marriage partners should "know each other" and "learn each other's ways"; they should be able to "share things together" and, ultimately, "pull together." It would seem, then, that the respondents regard romantic love as a possibility for others—even their sons and daughters—but not for themselves.[56]

Of the 55 families, 39 were studied most intensively. Among these families, most of the women who have illegitimate children were once married but are now separated from their husbands.[57] As we shall see later, financial problems are the major factor in separations.[58] This suggests that an

improvement in the income and earning status of young adult males may be a better illegitimacy preventive than sex education or birth control.[59] Here is a pertinent comment by a mother who had four children by four different fathers:

> *I'm not so old that I don't want a man sometime. Some men soft-soap you and tell you they love you and what they are going to do for you. Then when the real test comes and they're faced with putting up or shutting up, they just watch for their chances and move out of town.*
>
> *If a man has anything and offers to help you out you don't say to him, "but you'll have to marry me first." You take what he offers you right off and you offer what you have in return. Of course, you hope that some day he will want to make it legal. But, beggars can't be choosers.*[60]

This analysis of 39 families shows a continuance of all marriages which resulted from long courtships. The length of courtships varied from two and one half months to six years. Respondents generally agreed that longer courtships are desirable because a couple, as one respondent put it, "needs to know each other."[61]

Most separated couples tried to make their marriages work. Four-fifths of all terminated marriages within this study group lasted longer than four years, and most of these marriages were described as having had a good beginning.[62] This suggests that the problem of "broken" families is not one of instilling marriage values. Appreciation of these values already exists. The attention should be focused on ways and means for helping young couples make their marriages work.[63]

Another CRS statistic is pertinent to a common stereotype. Among Public Assistance families in this study group, 10 out of 12 terminated marriages had lasted for four or more years.[64] This suggests that low income couples do not break up for the sole purpose of obtaining a dole.

The "Good" Man and The "No Good" Man: *What else could be more important to a woman than a man? Maybe it's the money. . . .*

Low income mothers and children show an acute awareness of the role that the father is supposed to play in child rearing. The "good man" is expected to perform the same economic function that he performs in middle class families: that of a good provider who "takes care of," "looks out for" and is "responsible" for his family's financial needs. The "good man," however, need not have a "good" job in terms of status and prestige. Low income mothers place even more stress than middle class mothers on the size of their husbands' pay envelopes. A mother of six children, for instance, chided her husband for not being aggressive in

looking for a second job to increase the family's income. Showing his pay stub, she said: *This looks more like a receipt for a woman's paycheck instead of a man's.*[65]

In addition to financial care, the "good man" is expected to help mothers in the physical care of children. Men are praised for cleaning, cooking, shopping. Only one respondent mentioned love and attention to children as a "good man" requisite. One other mother would require her ideal husband to play with the children and take them on outings, and just two respondents cited child training and guidance as a good fatherly function. One mother spoke specifically:

> *. . . Boys are a little too rough for me. I'll keep 'em clean, and I'll feed 'em, and I'll see that they eat. But I'm not going to play football with them. That's Daddy's part. And I think that with a boy . . . it's Daddy's job to really set down and really tell him about marriage.*

By and large, though, mothers had limited visions of the ideal father's role. This could mean low income mothers with several children feel that physical care is the essence of child rearing. Or they may take the practical view that the sheer "burden" of caring for a number of children demands father's help. Or it could be that the realities of poverty prevent the conception of more abstract goals, such as the idealization of a good father as a "pal" for his children.

The "good man," in sum, is one "who works and keeps his job, feeds and clothes his family and provides some place for his family to live," or even more simply, "a man who takes care of his family and treats them nice." [66]

In citing examples of a "good man" most respondents went beyond their own households. Only three husbands were specifically referred to as "good" in the intensive study group of low income mothers.[67] None of the three was a heavy drinker or given to "fussing and fighting." In contrast, there were 17 husbands in the study group cited as "no good." [68] The ranking order of attributes of the "no good man" are inadequate work or wages, mismanagement of money, problem drinking and contacts with other women.[69]

Job inadequacy is reflected by the fact that three-fifths of the males in the 39 families whose employment was noted had experience as service workers and laborers. Many of their jobs — messenger, porter, construction worker — offer the least in wages and job security.[70] CRS findings show, as one would expect, that economic insecurity has a direct bearing on the male's attitudes toward his wife and children.[71]

Faced with a "no good" image and unpaid bills, many low-income fathers hardly consider the birth of another child as a "blessed event." Many leave home rather than endure an additional burden upon manhood and ego. The 39-family study shows that in one-third of the instances of family breakup — for reasons other than death — the wife

was pregnant at the time of separation or desertion.[72] The data, however, do not show if the pregnancy was the direct cause for the father's move.

The intensive study does not support the stereotype of the low income male as being completely footloose and irresponsible. In nearly four-fifths of the recorded marital breakups, it was the wife — not the husband — who precipitated the break, either by leaving herself or asking her husband to leave.[73] In almost every case, the break was caused by financial problems, even though money troubles were frequently compounded by a husband's drinking or interest in other women.[74]

The references to drinking are so frequent — more than one out of every four males was reported to have a drinking problem[75] — that more should be said about its effect upon low income households. The mothers tended to be pragmatic, rather than moralistic, in their assessment. Drinking is "trouble" that they can not afford, or as one mother put it: *There is much trouble around. Whiskey is the thing that is flowing all over.*

The troubles that drinking provokes are of various kinds — not only for poor families but for any family with an alcoholic father or one given to drinking sprees. Drinking is related to the loss of a job or the misuse of money, or conflicts between parents and children, or bouts with the law. Drinking can mean any one of these things, or all of them, but the periodic "bender" that is tolerated by a middle class wife can spell disaster to a low income family. The loss of rent money could mean eviction, or the waste of just a few dollars could mean hungry children.[76]

CRS findings on drinking and the "no good man" suggest that more attention should be given to the generally negative connotation of the "broken home." Some mothers felt that the child-rearing climate was improved by separation from a "no good man." One mother, for instance, said she and the children "live in peace" now that her wine-drinking husband has gone.[77]

Yet a woman's "need for a man" and the children's "need for a father" often overrides a husband's negative qualities. Thus a mother of 10 may abide a husband who only earns $52 a week, yet he refuses to get surplus food from the Welfare Department, or follow up on an application for public housing. He also drinks, and is belligerent about it:

> *Nobody's got anything to do with how much I drink. I do drink and that's all there is to it. I work, too. I bring money in this home. . . . I get out of here every day except Monday and go to work. I am the man in this house and I'm not supposed to be responsible for taking care of these children and working too.*[78]

One mother of 10 young children by "about three" dif-

ferent men engaged in fantasies about a husband who had left the home many years ago. When a CRS worker asked the woman's seven-year-old daughter what she was writing in her notebook, the girl replied: *I'm writing to my Daddy.*

The City of Hope and Destruction: *They were hard working in Carolina. That's what I can't understand. They were very hard working at home but changed here.*

CRS materials suggest that the urbanization and continuing social and economic deprivation of Negroes wield far more influence on Negro family life than the slavery heritage. One Negro father, who had been deserted by his wife, complained that his wife "went wild" after she came to the city from her home "two miles in the pine woods" of Georgia. But the bulk of CRS materials show that urbanization is particularly damaging to Negro males. As jobs for unskilled Negro males, both urban and rural, rapidly decline, the materials suggest that the Negro father's role may be compromised before Negro families leave the South.[79] Here is an observation made of a mother who had migrated with her husband and nine children from a South Carolina town:

> I asked [the mother] why they had moved to Washington and she said they had moved because her husband couldn't get work. It was hard for menfolks, she said, as they just couldn't find work. The women, she continued, could get jobs as maids, working in a laundry, or taking care of children. She had a job doing housework and had been on it several years as she didn't believe in changing jobs. However, there was nothing for her husband to do there.[80]

Urbanization — for whites and Negroes at all income levels — has taken the father away from the home to work and has obscured his function as provider and protector of the home. In the cities and suburbs, children spend more time under their mother's care, thereby enhancing the motherhood role. If a father is periodically or chronically unemployed, the father appears as an idle malingerer. He lives on social security payments, or, in the case of many Negro families, he is supported by his wife's earnings in domestic employment — an insatiable market for low income women.[81]

Some of the effects of urbanization on poor families are implicit in the responses of one mother — a domestic worker — who migrated to Washington along with a number of brothers and sisters from a tenant farm in South Carolina. After the mother complained that two of her brothers have become criminals and "sit around and drink wine," the following exchange ensued:

Question: Why don't the boys want to work? You and your sister are hard-working people.

Answer: *I cannot understand that. Father was a very hard working man. He still works. Father*

hoe cotton — three acres about. Before four o'clock he finish it. He look like he running away with the cotton.

Question: Were your brothers hard-working at home?

Answer: *Yes. They were hard working in Carolina. That's what I can't understand. They were very hard working at home but changed here. I cannot figure that out. Our father still working.*

In some instances the use of the matriarchal household pattern of Negro slavery as an easy explanation for complex social phenomena, prevents taking a harder look at post-slavery factors.[82] One avenue of exploration might be a study of the initial impact that cities have on low income families, Negro and white. This is suggested in the plight of one respondent, who was glad to leave a Kentucky farm, but ran into a new problem in the District:

> I [the interviewer] asked him how he made out when he first came to D. C. His answer was "Lousy." I asked why. He said that when he came to D. C. he thought that all he had to do was walk in a place and make application for a job and if he could do the work then he would be hired. He didn't know you had to take examinations for practically everything. When he went to see about the job, the first thing the man asked him was, "Have you taken the examination?" He said that he got so sick of hearing that question that he finally took a job cooking in a restaurant just so he wouldn't have to be bothered.

Poor Negroes frequently move into neighborhoods in which there is little sense of community in terms of a group consistency of life styles and objectives or group participation. An example of this was furnished by Richard Slobodin, an anthropologist, in a CRS observation of a one-block working class enclave described by a resident as a street "people pass by but never see." [83]

About one quarter of the block's residents were born there. Residents of less than five years were considered newcomers. Occupation and incomes were fairly uniform. Yet in a single block, scarcely the length of a football field, there were two ways of low income life. One half of the block contained the bulk of multiple family houses, drunks, welfare cases; the yards were grassless and littered. The other half contained single family homes, stable wage earners, and well-tended grass plots and backyards.[84] This suggests that because of housing segregation poor Negro families are lumped together, regardless of their ways of life, and are forced to struggle against the odds of slum neighborhood influences.[85]

Additional evidence of post-slavery influences on Negro family instability is found in the similarities in the behavior

of poor whites and poor Negroes. Incidents of alcoholism, desertion, sex promiscuity and "fussing and fighting" turned up among whites and Negroes alike. However, the major racial difference appeared in attitudes about life conditions and chances — things rarely seemed as hopeless for whites. Consider the optimism of a pregnant white waitress — deserted by her husband — whose chances for putting her baby "out" for adoption were far greater than those of any poor Negro woman facing the same plight. The CRS observer noted:

> Since Thelma is already wearing maternity clothes I felt free to ask her about her baby. She said that this will be her first child. Her husband — whom she refers to as "that son-of-a-bitch" — deserted her several months ago. She has no idea whatever of where he is and "doesn't give a damn." She is already making arrangements to put the child out for adoption immediately after it is born. Since she must make her own living, she said, and since she must make it in this kind of work she can not possibly give the child the kind of care, time and attention it has a right to. She added: *It wouldn't be fair for me to keep it, I know I'm doing the right thing.*[86]

Because of real or imagined prejudice against their race, Negroes risked fewer assumptions than whites about their chances for jobs or housing or providing an education for their children, or for "beating a police rap." When a white CRS worker, for instance, urged a Negro to stand up for his rights in court, the Negro replied: *You have rights. I would have them, too, if my face was the color of yours. But I'm black. I don't have no rights.*

Evidences of job discrimination were particularly conspicuous in responses by white and Negro workers in the building trades, where Negroes were virtually barred from union membership.[87] This is illustrated by an interview with a 50-year-old white painter, who described himself as a "half-ass sort of foreman":

> I [the interviewer] asked him if he had any Negroes working under him. He said "no" that right now they are building a house for an Army colonel and they never use Negroes on jobs in Maryland and Virginia because that would hurt the company's reputation. But when they have a job in Washington Negroes comprise a large share of the work force, mainly because the white painter has to be paid $28 a day, and the Negro laborer who is able and willing to do the same job gets only $14. The painter commented: *Give me a crew of six niggers and we'll knock out a five-story office building in a week. They all got families and $14 a day is damn good money for a nigger.*

CRS workers found that few low income Negro men

received significant satisfaction from their work; that their jobs offered not only small pay, but little, if any, dignity or status. Thus the cement finisher, after overhearing a conversation between two CRS workers about criminal law, said that he "didn't even know what [the workers] were talking about." When one of the workers told him that a lawyer or doctor would not know anything about pouring a sidewalk, the cement finisher replied: *Maybe so, but when was the last time you saw anybody standing around talking about concrete?* [88]

The cement finisher was one of the Negro streetcorner males whose jobs — as laborers, dishwashers, janitors — were described by Elliott Liebow as being at the bottom of the employment ladder in every respect from wage levels to prestige. "These men," Liebow said, "can not draw from a job those social values which other people do not put into it." Thus the streetcorner milieu of loud talk, sex and liquor is a sanctuary for men who can no longer endure the experience or prospect of failure, or as Liebow put it:

> There on the streetcorner, a shadow system of values constructed out of shared fictions permits men who have failed as breadwinners, husbands and fathers to be men once again, provided they do not look too closely at one another's credentials. The shadow system of values, together with the value system of society at large, makes for a world of ambivalence, contradiction and paradox, where failures are rationalized and weaknesses magically transformed into strengths.[89]

A more detailed description of the plight of one Negro father of six — who was mentioned earlier in this report — shows how current external influences bear most heavily on poor Negro families in the Nation's Capital. The father was an unskilled high school dropout at a time when only skilled workers were in demand. Although his wages as an assembly line worker in a bottling company were periodically supplemented by his wife's employment as a charwoman his base take-home pay — which fluctuated from $49 to $67 a week — did not equal the amount his wife would have received from the District Welfare Department had he deserted her and the children. Under D. C. law, no mother can qualify to receive Aid for Dependent Children if there is an able-bodied "man in the house."

He saw no chances for promotion. All of the foremen and all but one of the truck deliverymen were white. The Negro who made deliveries was paid by the hour rather than at the weekly $85 rate that was guaranteed to all white drivers. In addition, the Negro was denied the commission the whites received for each case delivered and picked up.[90]

The father did not know whether it was the union or the company that was responsible for discrimination against Negroes. All he knew was that discrimination surely existed.

In sum, he gave this description of his job:

> *. . . I get no satisfaction. You see, if they would get something like a goal that you could point to like . . . if a certain amount of cases were put out during the week, everybody gets a bonus . . . . They give you no incentive to work. You just go there because you can make a salary. That's all.*
>
> *I see no future at all because there is no future. That job is just one steady grind.*[91]

Thus the father had been denied a chance to excel at his work — the one satisfaction he felt that any man wanted from his life. All that was left for him, as he put it, "was to bring up my children right." And if he brought them up well and strong and they went out in the world and had families and were happy, then, he said, "that's leaving your mark on the world before you die."

NOTES: As They See Themselves

1. See Camille Jeffers, *Living Poor: A Participant-Observation Study of Choices and Priorities,* CRS manuscript, p. 130 f.
2. See Hylan Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia," paper presented at the National Conference on Social Welfare, May 16, 1961, Minneapolis, Minn., p. 9. For comparable attitudes derived from a St. Louis study, see Lee Rainwater, "Crucible of Identity: The Negro Lower-Class Family," *Daedalus,* Winter 1966, p. 206.
3. "'Al and Betty': Parenthood — Marital Status," CRS transcript, p. 5.
4. C. Jeffers, *Three Generations: Case Materials in Low Income Urban Living,* CRS manuscript, p. 37.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
6. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class and the Behavior of Low Income Families," paper given at the Conference on Lower Class Culture, Barbizon Plaza Hotel, New York City, June 27-29, 1963, p. 2).
7. H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty and the Behavior of Low Income Families," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, Chicago, Ill., March 19, 1964, p. 3.
8. *Ibid.*
9. C. Jeffers, "Work Classification of Adult Males," CRS working paper, pp. 1-4.
10. Jirina S. Polivka, "Report on the Female Workers and Working Mothers," CRS working paper, p. 4 ff.
11. J. S. Polivka, "Family Size, Parent Figure, and Life Cycle Table Analyses," CRS working paper, p. 3.
12. Child Rearing Study (CRS), *Child Rearing Practices Among Low-Income Families in the District of Columbia, A Progress*

Report, September 1959 - March 1961, Appendix F, p. R-13.

13. C. Jeffers, *Living Poor, op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
16. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, Appendix D, pp. Q-2, -15 and -22.
17. *Washington Post*, October 30, 1965, article cited in H. Lewis, "Family Life Among an Urban Low Income Population under a Federally Guaranteed Minimum Income Plan, 1991-1996," paper presented at Conference on Guaranteed Minimum Income, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration, Chicago, Ill., January 14-15, 1966, p. 4.
18. For attitudes toward the Welfare Department's Investigation Unit, see J. S. Polivka, "Report on Welfare Services," CRS working paper, p. 41 f.
19. *Ibid.*
20. For a description of this process, see J. S. Polivka, "Report on Welfare Services," *op. cit.*, p. 43 ff. See also, Arthur Shostak, "The Poverty of Welfare in America," in Shostak & Gomberg, *New Perspectives on Poverty*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1965, pp. 94-103.
21. See CRS, *Progress Report, passim;* also H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty and the Behavior of Low Income Families," *op. cit.*, pp. 5 ff.
22. See H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961), *op. cit.*, p. 6; also, H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families," in *Case Work Papers, 1961: From the National Conference on Social Welfare*, Family Service Association of America, New York, 1961, pp. 79-92; and H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Among Low Income Families," Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, Washington, D. C., 1961.
23. C. Jeffers, *Living Poor, op. cit.*, p. 86, footnote.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
26. CRS, *A Progress Report*, pp. 77-84; Roscoe E. Lewis, "History and Anatomy of a Block," CRS field report, pp. 3 ff. See also, Alvin L. Schorr, *Slums and Social Insecurity*, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1963, pp. 16 ff.
27. R. E. Lewis, "History and Anatomy of a Block," *op. cit., loc. cit.*
28. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff. See also, H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961). *op. cit.*, p. 6.
29. See, for example, L. Joseph Stone & Joseph Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, New York: Random House, 1957, pp. 274, 293.
30. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," *op. cit., loc. cit.*

31. Eugene Lerner, "The Identification of 'Cutting Points' in Parental Control," CRS staff working paper, p. 3.

32. Elizabeth Ross, "Comments on [H. Lewis'] 'Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia'," discussion paper delivered at the National Conference on Social Welfare, Minneapolis, May 16, 1961, p. 5.

33. For a more detailed discussion of the "cutting point" proposition and relevant CRS field materials, see CRS, *A Progress Report, op cit.*, p. 24 ff.

34. See C. Jeffers, *Three Generations, op. cit.*, p. 33.

35. E. Lerner, "The Identification of 'Cutting Points' . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 5.

36. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

37. See H. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty Approach to Social Problems," (Montreal, 1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 16.

38. See C. Jeffers, *Living Poor, op. cit.*, p. 44.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 41 ff.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

42. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, Appendix F, p. R-9.

43. C. Jeffers, *Living Poor, op. cit.*, p. 139.

44. See C. Jeffers, "Work Classification of Adult Males," *op. cit., loc. cit.*

45. D. Evers, "Education and Career Aspirations," CRS memorandum, p. 14.

46. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class, Behavior . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 15; also C. Jeffers, *Living Poor, op. cit.*, p. 78 ff.

47. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8; CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, pp. 32-51; and C. Jeffers, "Sex Values . . . ," *op. cit., passim.* See also, E. Herzog and H. Lewis, "Priorities in Research About Unmarried Mothers," paper presented at symposium, "Research Perspectives on the Unmarried Mother," Eastern Regional Conference, Child Welfare League of America, New York, April, 1961, *passim.*

48. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, p. 25.

49. C. Jeffers, "Sex Values, Pre-Marital Pregnancy, and Illegitimacy in a Study Group of Low Income Families," CRS staff working paper, p. 16.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

56. C. Jeffers, "Marriages," CRS staff working paper, p. 6.

57. CRS, *A Progress Report*, p. 34. See also, C. Jeffers, "Marriages," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

58. See C. Jeffers, "Marriage: Relations Between Parents — Other Responses," CRS working paper, p. 11 ff.

59. See H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty and the Behavior of Low Income Families," (Chicago, 1964) *op. cit.*, p. 16.

60. C. Jeffers, "Sex Values . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 4 f.

61. C. Jeffers, "Marriages," *op. cit.*, p. 1 f.

62. C. Jeffers, "Marriage: Relations . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 15.

63. H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty . . . " *op. cit.*, (Chicago, 1964), p. 12.

64. C. Jeffers, "Marriages," *op. cit.*, p. 12.

65. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

66. C. Jeffers, "The Low Income Father and Male Adult," CRS staff working paper, p. 1.

67. C. Jeffers, "Marriage: Relations . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

69. C. Jeffers, "The Low Income Father . . . ," *op. cit., passim.*

70. C. Jeffers, "Work Classification . . . ," *op. cit., passim.*

71. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, p. 55 f. Also, H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices . . . ," (Minneapolis, 1961), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

72. H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty and the Behavior of Low Income Families," (Chicago, 1964), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

73. C. Jeffers, "Marriage: Relations . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 22.

74. *Ibid.*

75. C. Jeffers, "The Low Income Father . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

76. *Ibid.*

77. C. Jeffers, "Sex Values . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 10.

78. C. Jeffers, *Three Generations, op. cit.*, p. 20.

79. For a description of the background conditions of this process in a Southern mill town, see H. Lewis, *Blackways of Kent*, New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1964, p. 121 ff.

80. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, Appendix F, p. R-2.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 55 ff; also see Robert H. Mugge, "Education and AFDC," *Welfare in Review*, January 1964, p. 4, and Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, New York. Harper & Row. 1965, p. 34 ff.

82. A recent example of using the historical matriarchal pattern to explain current problems is contained in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research, U. S. Department of Labor, 1965, p. 15 ff. This document is popularly known as "The Moynihan Report" for its principal author, Daniel P. Moynihan.

83. Richard Slobodin, "Uptown Square," CRS staff field report, p. 4.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 9 ff.

85. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, p. 78 ff. See also, Dorothy K. Newman, "Economic Status of the Negro," paper prepared for Planning Session, White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," Washington, November 16, 1965, p. 5 ff.

86. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 29.

87. See Ben D. Segal, "The Practices of Craft Unions in Washington, D. C. with Respect to Minority Groups," *Journal of Intergroup Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1959, pp. 46-52.

88. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class . . . ," *op. cit.*, p. 28.

89. Elliott Liebow, abstract of unpublished doctoral dissertation, *Behavior and Values of Streetcorner Negro Men*, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., 1965.

90. CRS, *A Progress Report, op. cit.*, p. 57.

91. *Ibid.*

POVERTY'S CHILDREN – But for the Grace of God

In summary, this document represents an interpretation of how CRS findings relate to some of the caste and class distinctions that plague the poor and undermine any effort to eliminate poverty. The values and goals of the poor tend to conform to and converge with middle class standards. Thus lower class culture cannot be defined, as one social scientist stated, as "a cultural system in its own right — with an integrity of its own." [1]

The section titled "As They See Themselves" sought to clear up a number of popularized misconceptions about the poor. For the purpose of this summary, below is a listing of what "they say" about the poor along with a CRS point of view:

They say that poor families neglect their children.

CRS found that neglect is not characteristic of low income families; that child rearing practices, which appear as neglect, often have a rational, pragmatic base. It is often necessary to train children away from dependency upon their parents.

They say that poor families willingly permit young children to "roam the streets until all hours."

CRS found that freedom evidenced in the behavior of poor children is not necessarily granted willingly to them. It is often wrested from begrudging parents who are unable to compete with neighborhood influences.

Thy say that poor families care nothing about their children's education.

CRS found that poor families are fully aware of the value of education, as well as other middle class values, but lack the money, the "know-how" and "contacts" for realizing educational and career goals.

They say that the sexuality of poor families is "free and easy."

CRS found that poor families are often Victorian in their prudish attitudes and inhibitions about sex. These inhibitions prohibit them from teaching their children "the facts of life."

They say that poor families attach no stigma to illegitimacy.

CRS found that poor families place a high value on children "having a name;" that pregnancy out-of-wedlock is a "mistake" that should not be repeated.

They say that low income fathers are quick to leave their families.

CRS found that poor parents try to make their marriages work. Inadequate job opportunities and wages are the major causes for desertions.

They say that Negro families are basically weak because of their slavery background.

CRS found that urbanization and the continuing social and economic deprivation of Negroes wield far more influence on family life than events of 100 or 200 years ago.

The above listing of what "they say" about the poor should be avoided in developing any cure for poverty. Any such prescription becomes a nostrum if it stems from a diagnosis that "middle class values" — the importance of work, education, and of the father's responsibility for the support of the family — are not recognized by poor families. Efforts to inculcate these values will be a bitter pill if periodic or chronic unemployment has undermined the father's ability to support his family.[2]

Continuing a medical analogy, CRS Director Hylan Lewis refers to "multi-problem" or "hard-core" families which manifest chronic illegitimacy, delinquency and other social ills as "clinical" cases that should be treated, even though they show limited chances of rehabilitation. A far greater effort, Dr. Lewis feels, should be made to support "pre-clinical" or "sub-clinical" families that can be saved at less cost to the community.[3]

Corrective efforts should be focused on background conditions — lack of jobs, housing, education — that cause wayward behavior rather than on presumably different class or cultural values. Further, anti-social behavior cannot be reduced by continuing to segregate the poor, sealing them off from the affluent society.[4]

CRS materials support the 1964 Economic Opportunty Act's provision for "maximum feasible participation" by the poor, but see such participation as no substitute for professional assistance. Some poor families have an appreciation for professional know-how,[5] but resent the condescension and contempt that too many social workers, teachers, and law officers demonstrate in "dealing" with the poor. If sincere and respectful, middle class practitioners need not abdicate their professional responsibility to "indigenous leaders."

In community organization, social workers should be constantly aware of the wide variety of life styles among the poor. Too frequently community organization and block work projects assume that since low income families live in the same neighborhood, they can all be organized into a viable community. Families may live side by side, yet not have much in common or do anything together. Trying to organize such families leads to built-in frustration.[6] One frequent result is that all poor families, both "deserving" and "undeserving" are written off as "hard-to-reach" because they will not cooperate with each other or with block organizers.

Professionals should approach the poor with fewer prejudgments about family structure, dependency, and length of urban residence. CRS materials indicate that parents showing a high degree of concern for their children are found variously among families receiving Public Assistance and those which do not, among one-parent as well as two-parent families, among "newcomers" to Washington as well as those that are either natives or long-time residents of the city.[7]

From a practical standpoint, there is no such thing as *The* Low Income Family or *The* Negro Family. The only broad assumption that can be made about Negro families, regardless of income, is that they all have suffered from race discrimination. But for programming, training and public interpretation, the stress should be on the near-infinite variety of adaptations that low income families, both white and Negro, have made to American life.[8]

Finally, the poor recognize and affirm middle class values, but lack the money to realize the goals and aspirations that inextricably bind the poor to the larger society. The tragedy of poor parents is the unremitting tension between their desire and their ability to help themselves and their children.[9]

NOTES: But for the Grace of God

1. Walter B. Miller, *Cultural Features of an Urban Lower Class Community,* (mimeographed), n.d., p. 8.
2. H. Lewis, "The Contemporary Poverty Syndrome," speech to Howard University medical students, April 28, 1964, pp. 18-19.
3. H. Lewis, "Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia," paper presented at the National Conference on Social Welfare, Minneapolis, Minn., May 16, 1961, p. 6.
4. H. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty Approach to Social Problems," paper presented at Plenary Session, Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Montreal, Canada, August 29, 1964, p. 14 f.
5. C. Jeffers, *Living Poor: A Participant-Observation Study of Choices and Priorities,* CRS Manuscript, pp. 176-177.
6. H. Lewis, "Culture, Class and the Behavior of Low Income Families," paper given at the Conference on Lower Class Culture, Barbizon Plaza Hotel, New York City, June 27-29, 1963, p. 40.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. H. Lewis, "Assisting the Negro Family Caught in Social Change," speech at Golden Anniversary Conference of the National Urban League, Hotel Commodore, New York, September 7, 1960, p. 5.
9. H. Lewis & C. Jeffers, "Poverty and the Behavior of Low Income Families," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, Chicago, Ill., March 19, 1964, p. 17.